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ABSTRACT

Characteristics that distinguished "best" and "worst" clinical teachers as perceived by baccalaureate nursing students and faculty were identified and comparisons were made of student and faculty perceptions. Twenty-eight clinical teachers and their 173 undergraduate students participated in the study, which was conducted at seven university nursing schools in Western Canada and the United States. The Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory was used to rate teachers. Being a good role model was found to be the most discriminating characteristic for both groups. Consensus was found between faculty and students on 8 of the 10 highest rated characteristics for best clinical and on 6 of the 10 lowest rated characteristics. Analysis of variance of category scores for best teachers showed significant differences between ratings by the two groups for personality traits, evaluation, and interpersonal relationship. There were no significant differences for teaching ability or for ratings of categories for worst clinical teachers. (Author/SW)

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Characteristics of "Best" and "Worst" Clinical Teachers As Perceived by Baccalaureate Nursing Students and Faculty

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Abstract

Although clinical teaching is recognized as a critical part of nursing education, criteria for effective clinical teachingt are lacking. This study identified and compared characteristics of best and worst clinical teachers as perceived by baccalaureate nursing students and faculty. Two hundred and one subjects rated their best and worst clinical teachers using the Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory (NCTEI). Being a good role model was found to be the most discriminating characteristic for both groups. Consensus was found between faculty and students on eight of the ten highest rated characteristics for best clinical teachers and on six of the ten lowest rated characteristics. Analysis of variance of category scores for best teachers showed significant differences between ratings by the two groups for Personality Traits, Evaluation and Interpersonal Relationship. Nursing Competence was rated similarly by faculty and students. There were no significant differences for Teaching Ability nor for scores in any category for worst clinical teachers.

Findings of this study not only identify specific characteristics ascribed to best and worst clinical teachers, but also raise interesting questions regarding the differences in perceptions of faculty and students, and point to the urgent need for further research in this important area of nursing education.

Clinical teaching is recognized as one of the critical aspects of nursing education. It is in the clinical milieu that the students apply theory, learned in the classroom, to real patients. It is here, that a teacher must be able to assist the student to develop "critical thinking skills in relation to effective problem solving; ethical decision making; clinical practice evaluation and application of nursing research to practice" (CNA, 1985). Thus it is amazing how little research can be found on this important matter. A few researchers (Barham, 1965; Jacobson, 1966; Wong, 1978; O'Shea & Parsons, 1979; Schimpfhauser, Wittleman & Sachs, 1981; Mogan & Knox, 1983) have collected characteristics or behaviors described as critical by students and or faculty. Others (Lowery, Keane & Hyman, 1971; O'Shea & Parsons, 1979; Schimpfhouser et al., 1981; Brown, 1981; Wiley, 1984; Mogan & Knox, 1983) compare the relative importance ascribed to these characteristics by faculty and students. No study could be located that identified characteristics most typically ascribed to best and worst clinical teachers. The present study was designed to explore this issue. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1) What are the specific characteristics differentiating BEST from WORST clinical teachers?
   a) as rated by students
   b) as rated by faculty
2) Is there a significant difference between five caqtegories of teacher characteristics as rated by students and faculty?
   a) differences between categories for BEST clinical teachers
   b) differences between categories of WORST clinical teachers.

METHOD

Sample

Two hundred and one subjects, 28 clinical teachers and their 173 undergraduate students, participated in the study. Respondents were drawn from seven university schools of nursing, located in the western part of Canada and the United States. Faculty all had university preparation in nursing, their teaching experience varied from zero to more than ten years.

Sophomore, junior and senior students were fairly equally represented. Freshmen were not included since acceptance criteria demanded that students be taught by at least three clinical teqachers before participating. Students' ages ranged from 19 to 46 years.

Instrument

The Nursing Clinical Teacher Effectiveness Inventory (NCTEI) was the research instrument used for this study. This instrument was developed by the authors and was presented here two years ago. the NCTEI is a 48-item checklist which describes discrete teacher characteristics clustered into five subscales or categories: Teaching ability, Nursing competence, Personality traits, Interpersonal relationship, and Evaluation. Raters judge on a seven point Likert scale, how descriptive a specific characteristic is of a specific teacher. Category scores are obtained by summing scores of all items within a category. A total score for a particular teacher is obtained by summing the five category scores. Higher scores imply more positive teacher characteristics.

The instrument was found to be internally consistent (χ = 0.79-0.92), was stable over time (test re-test scores at four weeks interval ranged from

r = 0.76-0.93), and was considered to have content and face validity.

Procedure

Data collection for this descriptive study was conducted in seven university schools of nursing in Canada and the U.S. NCTEI-s were mailed or given to volunteer teachers and students with the direction to think of their best clinical teacher and to rate him or her using the inventory. Next respondents were asked to think of their worst clinical teacher and to rate him or her as well. The inventories did not require the name of the respondent. Students were asked their age and year in the program. Teachers were only asked to indicate the number of years they had been teaching.

Completed questionnaires were collected by volunteer students and returned to the investigators.

FINDINGS

Means and standard deviations for each item for worst and for best clinical teachers as perceived by students and by faculty were calculated and the 10 highest rated characteristics for best clinical teachers as perceived by students were compared to the 10 characteristics rated highest by faculty. The same comparisons were made for the 10 lowest rated characteristics for worst clinical teachers. (If two characteristics obtained equal ratings, both items were included in the comparison which resulted in unequal numbers appearing in the lists.)

Best Clinical Teacher Characteristics

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Highest rated characteristics of best clinical teachers were perceived fairly similarly by both groups. Eight of the 11 items were mentioned by both groups. Most of these items came from the categories TEACHING and NURSING. Both groups perceived best clinical teachers as good role models, who enjoyed nursing and teaching. They were well prepared for teaching, were seen as self confident, skilled clinicians who took responsibility for their own actions. These teachers were also approachable and fostered mutual respect. Characteristics of best teachers identified by faculty but not by students came from categories Teaching and Nursing. The characteristics identified by students as being typical of best clinical teachers came from the categories Personality and Evaluation.

Worst Clinical Teacher Characteristics

(Insert Table 2 about here)

There was less agreement between the two groups on the characteristics of worst clinical teachers. Still, six of the ten items were mentioned by both groups. These came from the categories Nursing, Personality, and Interpersonal Relationship. Items from the category Teaching were identified by faculty only. Other characteristics perceived by faculty as lacking by worst clinical teachers were a lack of communication skills and enjoyment of nursing, and an ability to identify objectively students' strengths and limitations.

Students perceived their worst teachers as lacking in empathy. They also felt that worst teachers were difficult to approach, did not communicate their expectations clearly and belittled students when they corrected their mistakes.

Differences between faculty and students' category scores.

Analysis of variance of category for "best" teachers showed significant differences between ratings by the two groups for three of the five categories: **Personality Trait** $F(1,188) = 18.2$, $p<.001$; **Evaluation** $F(1,188) = 20.64$, $p<.001$; **Interpersonal Relationship** $F(1,178) = 17.64$, $p<.001$. There was no significant difference in rating of **Teaching Ability** $F(1,178) = 21$, $p = .15$. **Nursing Competence** was rated similarly by faculty and students $F(1,187) = 0$, $p = 1$.

Differences for "worst" clinical teacher characteristics were not significant: **Teaching Ability** $F(1,187) = 1.95$, $p = .13$; **Personality Trait** $F(1,184) = .76$, $p = .38$; **Evaluation** $F(1,185) = .24$, $p = .63$; **Interpersonal Relationship** $F(1,187) = .04$, $p = .85$; **Nursing Competence** $F(1,178) = 2.05$, $p = .15$.

Discussion

This study was designed to explore whether there are characteristics that differentiate "best" from "worst" clinical teachers, what these characteristics are, and whether students and faculty have similar or dissimilar perceptions about these characteristics.

Results show that students and faculty in this study did indeed ascribe different characteristics to "best" as compared to "worst" clinical teachers. Both groups agreed that being or not being a good role model was the most critical characteristic differentiating the good from the less desirable clinical teacher.

Although no other study comparing "best" to "worst" clinical teacher could be located in the nursing literature, some authors (O'Shea & Parsons,

1979; Rauen, 1974; Kiker, 1973; Stuebbe, 1980;) have cited role modelling as a critical clinical teacher behaviour. However, what a teacher does to be perceived as a good role model needs to be further explored.

Data presented here suggests that faculty and students have fairly similar views regarding specific characteristics of "best" teachers: eight of ten items rated highest by students were among those rated highest by faculty. There was greater divergence between the two groups when worst teachers were rated. Nonetheless, six of the ten lowest rated characteristics were similar.

In contrast to overall agreement between the two groups about specific characteristics, when ratings of categories of clinical teacher characteristics by students and faculty were compared, the picture became less clear. Ratings of the two groups differed significantly for "best" clinical teachers' **Personality Traits**, **Interpersonal Relationships**, and **Evaluation** but were similar for best clinical teachers' **Nursing Competence**, and **Teaching Ability**. High ratings by students in the first three categories accounted for the differences. High ratings in these categories might reflect high student anxiety in the clinical area which interfered with their learning. Thus, best teachers were perceived by students as those who were best able to reduce their anxiety, those whose personality was warm, and who could relate well to them. Discrepancies might also have been due to students' greater emphasis on characteristics that affected them personally. They perceived their best teacher as a nice person who was able to relate well to them. Faculty, less affected by the "pleasantness" of the clinical teacher, rated these categories lower. Both groups, however, valued "best" teachers' nursing competence and teaching ability. Their ratings thus were similar. Students' tendency to rate teachers on personal qualities has often been

criticized by researchers, calling teacher evaluations by students more a popularity contest than an evaluation (MacKay, 1974; Bronstein, 1979).

Ratings for worst clinical teachers, although not similar for any category (including **Nursing Competence**) never reached statistically significant differences. This is probably due to greater variability within groups, thus reducing differences between the two groups. Why there is greater variability in the perception of participants regarding the "worst" clinical teacher than regarding "best" clinical teachers is difficult to explain. However, students' reluctance or inability to comment on their clinical teachers' weaknesses has been noted by several authors (Mogan & Knox, 1983; O'Shea & Parsons, 1979).

Although comparisons of results of this study with findings by other researchers is difficult, in view of the exploratory stage of research in the area of clinical teaching, it is worth noting that inconsistencies in findings are quite general. Differences between students' and teachers' perceptions were found by Stuebb (1980) and O'Shea and Parsons (1979) although not by Barham (1965) or Mogan and Knox (1983). A replication of Brown's (1981) study by Wiley (1984) provided differing results. How might these inconsistencies be interpreted? Are students' perceptions different from those of faculty or do they differ according to circumstances and differing research approaches? If they differ, whose judgement is valid? That is, do students learn more from teachers they perceive to be effective of from teachers whom faculty consider to be good but students do not?

Questions raised by the findings of this study are intriguing but in no way unexpected. The teaching/learning process is a complex human transaction, dependent on a multitude of variables--psychological, sociological, and

environmental--which have to be studied before definitive results can be forthcoming and recommendations for effective teaching can be advanced. The complexity of this process is multiplied by the milieu in which clinical teaching takes place. Pain, suffering, and the ever present threat of death, found in most clinical settings create an atmosphere unsuitable for learning. Added to this highly charged atmosphere is the fear of possible grave consequences resulting from errors the learner might commit. The ability to transform this unsuitable milieu into one conducive to learning is a skill needed by an effective clinical teacher--a skill not often shared by teachers in other settings.

Recommendations for further study.

Results of this study show that being a good role model is viewed by subjects of this study to be the most important characteristic distinguishing "best" from "worst" clinical teacher. Although findings of this exploratory study cannot be generalized, the unequivocal opinion of both faculty and students about this characteristic lends this finding sufficient credence to warrant further exploration by repeating this study and also by researching the concept of **role model** in nursing. In view of inconsistent findings of this and other studies regarding the perception of faculty and students about different clinical teacher characteristics, it is recommended to supplement survey research with studies involving direct observation of clinical teacher behaviours and assessing the effectiveness of these behaviours.

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Table 1. Highest Rated Characteristics of Best Clinical Teachers as Perceived by Students and Faculty

	STUDENTS				FACULTY		
	Item	$\bar{x}$	sd		Item	$\bar{x}$	sd
*	Is a good role model (N)	6.63	0.68	*	Enjoys teaching (T)	6.60	0.69
*	Enjoys nursing (N)	6.52	0.72	*	Is a good role model (N)	6.57	0.63
*	Demonstrates clinical skills and judgement (N)			*	Demonstrates clinical skill and judgement (N)	6.54	0.51
*	Enjoys teaching (T)	6.48	0.92	*	Enjoys nursing (N)	6.54	0.64
*	Is well prepared for teaching (T)	6.40	0.83		Stimulates student's interest in the subject (T)	6.50	0.98
*	Takes responsibility for own actions (N)	6.38	0.76		Explains clearly (T)	6.21	0.69
*	Is approachable (R)	6.38	0.93		Demonstrates a breadth of knowledge in nursing (N)	6.18	0.86
*	Is self-confident (P)	6.36	0.80	*	Takes responsibility for own action (N)	6.18	0.86
	Demonstrates enthusiasm (P)	6.31	0.88	*	Is well prepared for teaching (T)	6.14	0.89
	Promotes student independence (E)	6.29	0.85	*	Is self-confident (P)	6.07	0.98
	Corrects students mistakes without belittling them (E)	6.29	1.01	*	Is approachable (R)	6.07	1.02

Note. The means and standard deviations reported here were calculated from a seven point response set where 1 = not at all descriptive, 7 = very descriptive.

* characteristic included by students and faculty
(T) Teaching ability
(N) Nursing competence
(P) Personality
(E) Evaluation
(R) Interpersonal Relationship

Table 2 Ten Lowest Rated Characteristics of Worst Clinical Teachers as Perceived by Students and Faculty

	STUDENTS				FACULTY		
	Item	$\bar{x}$	sd		Item	$\bar{x}$	sd
*	Is a good role model (N)	2.36	1.47	*	Is a good role model (N)	2.39	1.45
*	Uses self-criticism constructively (P)	2.63	1.51	*	Recognizes own limitations (N)	2.46	1.11
*	Is open-minded and nonjudgmental (P)	2.67	1.67	*	Uses self-criticism constructively (N)	2.48	1.28
	Demonstrates empathy (R)	2.70	1.66		Enjoys nursing (N)	2.50	1.53
	Corrects students' mistakes without belittling them (E)	2.71	1.86	*	Encourages a climate of mutual respect (R)	2.50	1.35
*	Encourages a climate of mutual respect (R)	2.72	1.62		Demonstrates communication skills (N)	2.61	1.26
*	Provides support and encouragement to students (R)	2.81	1.63		Stimulates student interest in the subject (T)	2.61	1.10
	Communicates clearly expectations of students (E)	2.68	1.66		Identifies students' strengths and limitations objectively (E)	2.64	1.34
	Is approachable (R)	2.87	1.76	*	Is open-minded and nonjudgmental (P)	2.74	1.61
*	Recognizes own limitations (N)	2.90	1.64	*	Provides support and encouragement to students (R)	2.86	1.46
					Helps students organize their thoughts about patient problems (T)	2.86	1.30

Note. The means and standard deviations reported here were calculated from a seven point response set where 1 = not at all descriptive, 7 = very descriptive.

* characteristic included by students and faculty
(T) Teaching ability
(N) Nursing competence
(P) Personality
(E) Evaluation
(R) Interpersonal Relationship

Table 3 Most Discriminating Characteristics Between Best and Worst Clinical Teachers

	STUDENTS				FACULTY		
	Item		difference		Item		difference
*	Is a good role model	(N)	4.27	*	Is a good role model	(N)	4.18
	Corrects students' mistakes without belittling them	(E)	3.59	*	Enjoys nursing	(N)	4.04
*	Encourages a climate of mutual respect	(R)	3.56		Stimulates student interest in the subject	(T)	3.89
*	Enjoys nursing	(N)	3.53		Recognizes own limitations	(N)	3.54
*	Is approachable	(R)	3.48		Demonstrates communication skills	(N)	3.43
	Gives students positive reinforcement for good contributions, observations or performance	(E)	3.48		Explains clearly	(T)	3.35
	Provides support and encouragement to students	(R)	3.48		Demonstrates a breadth of knowledge in nursing	(N)	3.21
	Is open-minded and nonjudgmental	(P)	3.39		Encourages a climate of mutual respect	(R)	3.18
	Demonstrates empathy	(R)	3.32		Enjoys teaching	(T)	3.15
	Does not criticize students in front of others	(E)	3.29	*	Is approachable	(R)	3.11
	Identifies students' strengths and limitations objectively	(E)	3.48		Offers special help when difficulties arise	(T)	3.11

Note. The means and standard deviations reported here were calculated from a seven point response set where 1 = not at all descriptive, 7 = very descriptive.

* characteristic included by students and faculty
(T) Teaching ability
(N) Nursing competence
(P) Personality
(E) Evaluation
(R) Interpersonal Relationship